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THE FIFTY-FIRST PSALM

J. M. NEALE. D. D.

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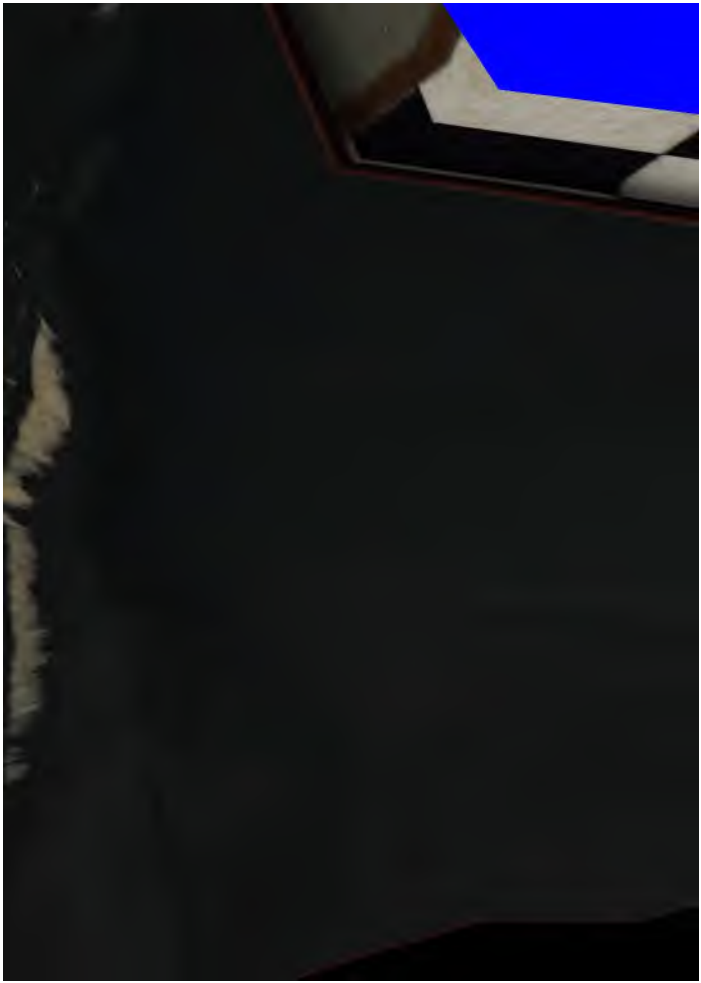


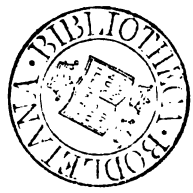
MISERERE:

THE FIFTY-FIRST PSALM

WITH DEVOTIONAL NOTES.

REPRINTED, WITH ADDITIONS,]

From Neale's "Commentary on the Psalms."



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138. c. 14.

PREFACE.

It has been thought desirable to reprint Dr. Neale's Commentary on Psalm LI., as a brief manual for devotional study in Lent and Advent. To fit it for more popular use, the marginal references to authors and some other details in the larger work have been omitted, while, on the other hand, many additions have been made, chiefly from the commentaries of Cassiodorus, Pope Urban IV., S. Bonaventura, Cardinal Hugo de S. Cher, and Girolamo Savonarola.

R. F. L.

Advent, 1870.

A COMMENTARY

ON

THE FIFTY-FIRST PSALM.

THIS may truly be called the Psalm of all Psalms; that which of all inspired compositions has, with the one exception of the LORD'S Prayer, been repeated oftenest by the Church. And there are almost as many mysteries in its position as there are in its structure.

As to the way in which the Church has repeated it. Till the last reformation of the Roman Breviary, it was said at every Hour, concluding the service, with the exception of Christmastide and the Great Forty Days. So, for some thirteen hundred years, this Fifty-first Psalm, in thousands of congregations, was repeated seven times daily. As S. Augustine says—and what small cause had he, compared to ourselves, thus to exclaim—"O most blessed sin of David, so gloriously atoned for! O most happy fault, which has brought in so many straying sheep to the Good Shepherd." And further notice the position of this Psalm as the fiftieth.[1] The Psalm, then, as the year of jubilee: so they all, those great lights of the Church, Origen, S. Hilary, S. Ambrose, S. Thomas, Cassiodorus, S. Jerome. Compare with this,

[1] That is, except in the Hebrew: the LXX. and Samaritan, and other almost contemporary versions reckoning it as the Vulgate.

as the same saints have done, the law given on the fiftieth day after the people had departed from the land of Egypt; compare the parable of our LORD about the two debtors, the one that owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty, (S. Luke vii. 41;) especially remembering the sin of David, which you will, in this Psalm; compare the penalty of fifty shekels of silver inflicted on him who, among the Israelites, had dishonoured a virgin. (Deut. xxii. 28.) Think also of the fifty just men with whom Abraham's petition began, (Gen. xviii. 24;) think of the width of the Ark, fifty cubits, that ark which was to save all those who *were* saved from the general ruin, (Gen. vi. 15;) further, of the breadth of the tabernacle which Ezekiel in vision beheld: and lastly of the freedom of Levites from the servile works of the tabernacle when their fiftieth year had been attained. (Numb. viii. 25.) But above all, the year of jubilee, when all debts were remitted, all manors returned to their original owners, all slaves were liberated, all prisoners were set free,—this, above all other interpretations, sets forth to us the mystery of this glorious fifty, which yet may be worked out, as we shall proceed to see, into many other senses.

TITLE: To the chief musician. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the Prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. "Where sin hath abounded, grace did much more abound." For consider how for nearly three thousand years that sin of David, that one momentary glance from the house-top, has given occasion to the enemies of the LORD, in each successive age, to blaspheme, down from the Lucians and Porphyries of primitive times, to the Voltaires and Humes and Paines of our own. And yet, no doubt the encouragement it has given to those who otherwise would have despaired, may be known to the Searcher of all hearts, far to outweigh the mischief and the blasphemy. So S. Augustine said in his time: so S. Bernard taught in his: so the latest of those who have any claim to the title of a me-

diæval teacher, S. Thomas de Villanova, more than once asserts: so the great schools which have their rise on the one hand from S. Vincent de Paul, on the other from De Hauranne, differing as far as Catholics can possibly differ on the subject, are nevertheless agreed in this. One can only remember S. Augustine's words, with respect to a still sadder fall, and apply them to this: "O sin of Adam, certainly necessary, which merited such and so great a Redeemer."

Here, too, we may observe how many theological terms have their first origin in this Psalm. The *Kyrie Eleison* at the beginning; the *clean heart;* the *broken and contrite heart;* the *sinner shall be converted;* and above all, here is first to be noticed, the first faint foreshadowing of one of the foundation truths of the Catholic faith. *Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.* Never before had the HOLY SPIRIT been made known to the Jewish Church; nor yet again was the Paraclete spoken of to them till Isaiah, now about to conclude his prophecies by his martyrdom, said of the generation in the wilderness: "They rebelled and vexed His HOLY SPIRIT."

Then as to the recitation of it. Never has Psalm whether by Priest in Confession, or by Synod in Canon, been so often put into the mouth of Penitents as this. And thus Origen; S. Hilary; S. Ambrose, more especially in his apology for David; Cassiodorus; S. Jerome; they all dwell strongly on this point. And again; it has been well observed that there is scarcely one great theological verity which is not in this wonderful Psalm set forth. Here you have—the Incarnation; the calling of the Gentiles; sin, both original and actual; the nature of preaching; grace, both justifying and sanctifying; the Atonement; the Institution of the Church; the Mission of the HOLY GHOST.

When Nathan the Prophet came unto him. They enter largely into the various opinions on this seer; some holding with mediæval writers that he is the same Nathan

with the son of David mentioned at the beginning of his reign; some with S. Ambrose, with S. Augustine, and others, that he was a natural son of Uriah, and afterwards adopted by David. The wonderful tale related by S. Epiphanius no reasonable critic will now believe. Only this is to be observed: that the "king's prophet," Gad, was not made the messenger of GOD to David; any more than two centuries later, when GOD had a message of life and death to Ahab, Elijah was not the prophet chosen: but the message which determined Ahab's fate was given to one of far less note, Micaiah. As to Bathsheba, S. Thomas most wonderfully observes how she is mentioned in the genealogy recorded by S. Matthew. Her name is not given; her husband's name *is* recorded; and so, in the genealogy of our LORD, her sin is stamped on the whole history; whereas, of the honour that she might have rightly claimed of being a progenitress of the Messiah, she is deprived by her name being withheld.

Before we enter on this Psalm, I may remark as a proof how dear it has been to the Church, from the most primitive time till now, that I know of a hundred and fifty-nine Catholic Commentators who have explained it, either in treating of the Psalms generally, or of the Penitential Psalms, or of this especial Psalm. One of these, whom I have not, however, had the means of referring to, Alfonso de Tostado, has published a folio volume of 1200 pages on this one Psalm. And even for those beyond the Church, this Psalm has still had its own charm; and the great Lutheran dictionary of the writers of that Communion mentions twenty-seven who had written separate volumes on it. I have no means of learning how many Calvinistic authors have also made it the matter of an especial treatise; but I believe that certainly not fewer than those of the Lutheran Communion. Take notice then, how, as one of the late Catholic Commentators says, the precious ointment of this Psalm not only ran down the beard, but went down to the skirts of

Aaron's clothing; but was diffused even among the other sheep which were not of the fold.

Argument.

Arg. Thomas. That Christ, without sin, for the sins of His people, was judged and overthrew His judges. The voice of the penitent. This Psalm is to be read at the lection of Isaiah the Prophet, and of the Acts of the Apostles, where Paul is chosen. The voice of Christ for penitent people, the voice of Paul, and of every one that believeth and doeth penitence. The doctrine of Confession, and a prophecy of the Church. Of martyrdom.

Ven. Bede. The history is known . . . . . Where we must earnestly observe, that to this end have the greatest saints been sometimes permitted to fall into such crimes, and their faults and penitence are recorded in Scripture, that to us, poor weak creatures, and following them at such a distance, fear and caution may be commended; and in their reformation an example of penitence and a hope of life may be given. But since even the evil deeds of saints work out the mystery of salvation, David signifies Christ: Bathsheba (which by interpretation is the *Well of Satiety*[1]) figures the Church: Uriah (which by interpretation is *My Light of God*) sets forth the devil, who desired fraudulently to seize the Light of the Godhead, but being overthrown by the Lord, lost the kingdom of the world, and put away the Church of the faithful to be governed by Christ.

[The usual mediæval interpretation is more ingenious. Hildebert thus writes:

Bersabee Lex est; Rex David, Christus; Urias,
Judæus;—regi nuda puella placet.

[1] That is, according to the reading of LXX. which in this place calls Bathsheba Βηρσαβεέ.

Nuda placet Christo Lex non vestita figuris;
Aufert Judæis hanc, sociatque sibi.
Vir non vult intrare domum, nec spiritualem
Intellectum plebs Israel ingreditur.
Scripta gerit, per scripta perit deceptus Urias:
Sic et Judæus scripta sequendo perit.

Bathsheba is the Law; King David, CHRIST;
Uriah is the Jew;—the girl disrobed
Pleases the King; and the Law, stripped of types,
Unhidden in its beauty, pleases CHRIST,
Who takes it from the Jews to be His own.
Uriah enters not his house; nor does
Israel go into the inward sense.
Letters Uriah bears, dies by their fraud;
Holding the letter, likewise dies the Jew.]

This Psalm is divided into five clauses. The first is the satisfaction of most perfect humility (1—6). The second, the confidence of heavenly mercy (7, 8). The third, that the LORD may turn away His Face from David's sin (9—12). The fourth, that other sinners will be encouraged if his terrible iniquity should be pardoned (13—17). The fifth, he commemorates the rise of the Church, which even then he looked for (18, 19).

EUSEBIUS OF CÆSAREA. The doctrine of Confession.

S. JEROME. This fiftieth Psalm echoes the voice of him that is penitent; showing, how he who has fallen into sin, may, by confessing that sin, rise again to good.

1 Have mercy upon me, O GOD, after Thy great goodness: according to the multitude of Thy mercies do away mine offences.

I can only begin, as Hugh of S. Victor begins, with this prayer: that what I should have felt of

the evil of sin, standing under the cross of the penitent thief on Calvary, and seeing the penalty of man's guilt in that central Cross, and understanding the actual existence of human malice from the mockers and blasphemers around,—*that*, so far as is possible, I may feel in writing of that Psalm concerning which it may of a truth be said: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." And first of all they observe,—they, the theological commentators, in their way,—just as they, the mediæval artists in their way,—that in the very origin of this Psalm, we have the trinity of evil; that diabolical parody in working out iniquity of the operations of the GOD Who saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good. David abused the power of a king, by giving command that Uriah should be slain. He abused the wisdom of a wise man by plotting the deceit which gave him over into the hands of the Ammonites. He took advantage of the goodness and purity of a righteous man, when he sent Uriah back again to the camp upon his refusing to enter into his house. So we have the Omnipotence of the FATHER; the Wisdom of the SON; the Holiness of the HOLY GHOST, betrayed; and by each and all great occasion given to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme. *According to the multitude of Thy mercies.* And they almost all, those great primitive and mediæval writers, take it of the Incarnation. And they well argue that sins, those sins of which David's were

the type, were utterly inexpiable under the old Law; that S. Paul spoke most simply the entire truth of these, when he said that for such there remained only a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. But, on the other hand, they delight, those heralds of GOD's mercy, to heap up the different promises by which that mercy is assured to penitents, even in the Old, how much more in the New Testament. "Thou hast magnified Thy mercy," so Lot says. (Gen. xix. 19.) "The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy," Moses pleads, when the spies returned. (Numb. xiv. 18.) "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness," says Joel. (Joel ii. 13.) "Thou hast showed great mercy unto David," says Solomon, in the beginning of his reign. (2 Chron. i. 8.) "Thy lovingkindness is better than the life itself," David tells us. (Ps. lxiii. 4.) "Mercy rejoiceth against judgment," so S. James teaches us. (S. James ii. 13.) And the 136th Psalm finds on the one side those like S. Ambrose who would principally see in it the Incarnation; on the other, those who like Innocent III., S. Thomas, S. Chrysostom, S. Cyril, and Hugo Cardinalis, would take it of the Passion. *The multitude of Thy mercies.* And they observe from this; that, although the one sin was now that which was the hardest to bear, which, to use the saint's own expression, bit the hardest, yet many and many another sin, when once he was roused to a sense of his guilt, also, as S. Hildebert says, fast-

ened on him like fiery serpents, he having made way to their incursion by that first original venom of the ancient guile. And how could one pass over this verse without quoting the words of S. Bernard? "*Do away mine offences.* How shouldst Thou not, O good JESUS, do them away? How should we not run after Thee? when we perceive that Thou despisest not the poor, abhorrest not the evil-doer, didst not keep off from the penitent thief, didst allow Thy feet to be kissed by her that was a sinner, didst receive the Syrophenician woman, didst accept her that was taken in adultery, in the very act; didst turn Levi the publican into Matthew the Evangelist; didst, out of the very spectators of Thy crucifixion, call one who was to be among the very chiefest of Thine Apostles." This is what S. Bernard takes as the innermost meaning of our first verse; and all the saints, and all the holy commentators whom I might reckon up by hundreds, have but repeated, have but diluted, his words; have but, knowing what they know of the terrible struggle between the new and the old nature—between the first and the Second Adam, said something, each according to his own capability, which might throw some small light on the first verse of the most wonderful of Psalms.

Have mercy. For it is the time for Thy *mercy*, not for Thy judgment, Who hast said that Thou hast come into the world, not to judge the world, but that the world may be saved. It is time for mercy, not for trial, because the sinner does not

attempt to hide his guilt, but throws himself upon the compassion of the Judge. *Upon me.* He does not venture to name himself, as he had once done, saying, "LORD, remember David," (Ps. cxxxii. 1,) nor even to call himself by the titles "Thy servant," and "the son of Thine handmaid." I have forfeited, he would say, that grace Thou gavest me when I was named, (and so the fallen Christian may say of his baptismal name,) so that Thou wouldest not know me, were I to call myself by that familiar title, wherewith I was wont to go up to the mount of prayer to seek Thee, when I was honourable in Thy sight, and my name was written among Thy servants in heaven. But now my sins have blotted me out of the Book of the Living, and till I win back Thy grace by penitence, I dare not speak in Thy presence the name of him who was once the man after Thine own heart. *O God.* He does not say *My* GOD, for he lost, by sin, the right to call Him so. *After Thy great goodness.* Deep calleth unto deep. The depth of misery calls upon the depth of mercy. The depth of sin calls upon the depth of grace. The depth of mercy is greater than that of sin, let it then swallow the lesser up. And therefore he saith, Thy *great* mercy, because of the greatness of his own misery. Help my cruel wound, cries the Doctor of Grace, according to Thy great medicine. My hurt is sore, but I take refuge with the Almighty. I should despair of my deadly wound, could I not find such a Physician. Well may he call it *great* mercy, for it brought the Creator of the

world down from heaven, clad Him in an earthly body, made Him the Guest of mortals, made the LORD of all a servant, the Bread of Life hungry, the Fount of Salvation thirsty, the Strength of GOD weak, the Eternal a victim to death. It is *great* mercy, for it not only forgives sin once, but again and again, nay, will even bring the sinner to glory. *According to the multitude of Thy mercies.* Because this sin of David was not a single one, but united in itself several forms of guilt, it needed several acts of GOD'S pardoning grace to cleanse it. He says well the *multitude*, having regard not only to the many occasions on which GOD has shown His mercy to the Fathers of old time, but to the manifold operations and effects of that mercy, in the conversion of sinners and the perfection of saints. *Do away mine offences.* Not only from my soul, that it may be henceforth pure, but from Thy memory, according to that saying, "I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sin no more," (Jer. xxxi. 34;) lest I come at last into judgment with Thee.

2 Wash me throughly from my wickedness : and cleanse me from my sin.

And here, notice first: how, great as David's sins were, lust to begin with, adultery to go on with, murder to end with: yet, it is not from these great sins, but also from the small transgressions which the world would think little of that he,—he, with all the enormous weight of that former guilt,—

prays to be freed. And observe further, that it is from the guilt, and not from the punishment, that he thus asks deliverance. That the sword should never depart from his house (2 Sam. xii. 10); that the sin, begun, not only secretly even in its full accomplishment, but far more secretly in the recesses of David's heart, should be punished before all Israel and before the sun; that the child so dear to David should be made one great punishment of his offence; these things, so far as this Psalm is concerned, might, or might not be. It is of the offence against GOD; of the defiling, although it were not then so expressly declared, GOD'S temple by impurity, that David speaks,—speaks, as S. Fulbert says, commenting on that word *throughly*, as if, more or less, longer or shorter, to Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, it were one and the same thing. And we must not wonder if, in these latter days, when the love of many is waxed cold, every possible excuse is looked for, every possible palliation is found in, the Old Testament; we must not wonder if that which was written by GOD to preserve from despair, is turned by Satan into the means to lead on to presumption. "So David sinned;" thus Hildebert speaks: "so David, having sinned, is pardoned. And I, I, may I not sin as far as David in impurity, and stop short of him in bloodthirstiness? May I not with him break the seventh, and yet keep the sixth Commandment? And, if I break both, the man after GOD'S own heart did the same." And, as the same S. Hilde-

bert says, "Ah, King of Israel, ah, ancestor of the CHRIST, is not this of GOD's infinite mercy toward thee, that, since thou hast occasioned, and wilt occasion, to the end of the world, so many, and so horrible, blasphemies, that thou shouldst also be the channel, through whose words the grace of GOD has descended to so many penitents; by whose teaching the GOD who is Himself a consuming fire, should draw His followers on to the eternal light of heaven; through whose attraction, the lamp to guide the feet of His servants in *this*, should become the same which never can go down or withdraw itself in *that* world?"

Wash me throughly. The LXX. and Vulgate read *Wash me more.* And this gives one force of the Hebrew הַרְבֵּה *multiplying*, that is, *much.* Wash me *more* than formerly, for this was a sin of knowledge, and needs more cleansing than one of ignorance, such as I often committed before. Wash me more than I dare to ask, or than I know how to ask, seeing that I do not know myself, "for I know nothing of myself, yet am I not hereby justified." Wash me *more* than once, (Symmachus, πολλάκις) and as Thou hast washed me already in the font of baptism, so now wash me again in the fount of penitential tears. Yea, again and again, until seventy times seven, so often as I fall. Let it be *throughly*, moreover, leaving no trace of my old sin within me, nor the memory of the pleasure I once took in it. *Throughly*, not only in the actual seat of the temptation and fall, but in my whole

nature, to guard me against any new guilt, not only against a relapse into this sin. And so the Apostle to his Master, "LORD, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." (S. John xiii. 9.) *And cleanse me from my sin.* Let it not be a mere washing, which may leave still some traces of sin, but a perfect cleansing, to make me stainless before Thee. Say then, O merciful GOD, O loving Man, O gentle Master, "I will, be thou clean." Use fire and steel on me, if need be, only cleanse me from my leprosy, which I show to Thee, my Eternal High Priest, hiding nothing from Thy sight, that Thou mayest deal with me as is good therein.

3 For I acknowledge my faults : and my sin is ever before me.

The heathen philosopher said: "What great truth is there in acknowledging the faults that a man has committed?" But here we have a more real appreciation of the difficulty. As S. Augustine says: if there be one madness greater than another, it is this,—not to be ashamed of the wound, but to be ashamed of the bandage. They collect together the passages of Holy Scripture in which men confess that they have sinned; none better or more earnestly than S. Bernard. On the one side —S. Peter, S. Mary Magdalene, the Penitent Thief, the Prodigal Son, the King of Nineveh, the Jews at S. Peter's first sermon, the jailor at Philippi, Saul, afterwards S. Paul. But others have confessed like

the former Saul (1 Sam. xv. 24); again like Antiochus (2 Macc. ix.) Thence they go on to show how the power of confession first of all depends on the power of spiritual sight; first of all you must perceive yourself guilty, before you can own that you are. For Satan, like Nahash the Ammonite, is wont to put out the eyes of those whom he leads captive. (1 Sam. xi. 2; Judg. xvi. 21.) And then those deep writers on turning from sin, and the love of GOD, warn us of this, that the latter part of the verse, *my sin is ever before me* is, in and by itself, a very questionable kind of repentance. Sins may be so remembered as to be taken pleasure in again; they remark how many and many a prisoner has remembered his sins in prison, lived in them again, acted them over again, longed for the time when he might repeat them. Whereas the most perfect example of deep penitence, namely, that of S. Peter, is one as entirely separate from every re-inducement to sin. On the other hand, however much that blessed Apostle would grieve, without any mixture of any feeling but sorrow, when he remembered that crowing of the cock, and the more he dwelt on each particular circumstance of this sin, the self-assertion in presence of his dear Master on the preceding evening,—the presence of a cock in Jerusalem when, save by accident or negligence, none could be there,[1]—the hearing it once and not

[1] This refers to an opinion of some Rabbins that the cock was excluded from the Holy City. But such evidence as is forthcoming makes rather the other way.—L.

even then remembering, nay, the hearing it again, and not even so calling to mind what his LORD had said, till the same dear "LORD turned and looked upon Peter;" the more he followed out (as no doubt in those, to him, miserable hours, he did) the whole series of his fall, most certainly, the truer repentance. But, as Pinusius says, whoever should have advised David to go through all the steps of his sin in the same way and with the same detail would only have shown how little he knew of the human heart. Therefore, they proceed; here is one of the great lessons to be—taught in the first place, learnt in the next—*when* the committed sin should be *ever before* the sinner in its details; *when* only in its general substance and weight. *My sin is ever before me;* or, as it is in the Vulgate, though not in the LXX.,[1] *my sin is ever against me.* And therefore in that phrase the fathers of the Western Church have exercised themselves in exploring the full meaning. And again; S. Jerome takes the words: *my sin is ever against me;* in this sense, that sin separates GOD and man; therefore, that as man to be the true servant of his LORD, must seek Him by prayer, so "those iniquities which," as the Prophet says, "have separated between you and your GOD," and "that sin which hath hid His face from you that He will not hear" (Isa. lix. 2); these are indeed against us.

[1] And the Roman version follows the LXX. *Delictum meum* (not *contra* but) *coram me est semper*, and so also the Slavonic.

For I acknowledge my faults. I do not ask Thee to forget Thy justice in mercy, for I know that my sin justly deserves punishment, but I punish it myself now, that Thou mayest not do it later, I acknowledge, that Thou mayest forgive. It is no momentary and fleeting sense of guilt, for *my sin is ever before me*, as an accuser confronting me in presence of my Judge, as a grief constantly present to my mind. Once I cast it behind my back, and gave no heed to it, but now I have it before my face, never to be forgotten.

My guilty eye still seems to see my sin,
All things are characters to spell my fall;
What eye doth see without, heart sees within,
What heart doth see, to pensive thought is gall,
Which when the thought would by the tongue digest,
The ear conveys it back into the breast.

4 Against Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight: that Thou mightest be justified in Thy saying, and clear when Thou art judged.

And first of all we ask, in what sense it can be said that he had only sinned against GOD, when he had sinned both against Bathsheba and Uriah; and to this they add a different question: whether he sinned most against her or him. And this is to be observed beyond everything else; and so they who lived in the earlier and in the mediæval ages of the Church, seem to have felt most strongly how

far higher the law that our LORD came to lay down soars above even his law, whose present Psalm has been the support, comfort, guide, guardian, of so many thousand penitents. Take it in the words of a mediæval saint. "O my GOD! Thou knowest how often, how innumerable times, I myself, with ten thousand-fold the grace of this Thy saint,—of this, the man that was well-pleasing to Thee, have given Thee thanks for this Psalm. But this also: for this I thank Thee, that Thou hast given to the meanest of Thy servants now, the power to do,—the wisdom to know this in the Church, as compared to that in the Synagogue—that which Thy servant and saint only did not, because he knew not. I thank Thee, O LORD, that to us it is not allowed to enjoy that which we have unlawfully coveted, when possession becomes lawful. I thank Thee that Thou hast from Thy true and faithful servants, in this Thy better kingdom, closed that which, had it been still allowable to them, might have been a further incentive to sin." He means of course that to a Christian man, after the previous sin, Bathsheba would have been forbidden; and yet that, so far from this, she, of all David's wives, to the very last, had the greatest influence over him; and as they most truly observe, seems to have been, in that most corrupt generation, one of GOD's truest servants. But there are several ways in which the difficulty is resolved. *Against Thee only.* Some will have it that we only learn from the parable of the infinite ten thousand talents, and the

poor hundred pence, how a sin immediately committed against his neighbour may yet be man's infinitely more terrible accusation before his GOD. Others look at David's anointing; and there see a special grace given, and therefore a special power received; and therefore a special sin in the neglecting the inward strength which that bestowed power gave. Others—later in the mediæval Church—remembering how the dear Bridegroom and the dear Bride are one, will have it that a sin against the latter is equally an offence against the former. To which it is answered: that the Synagogue can scarcely claim the same love from, the same union with our LORD, that His Church now can.[1] *Against Thee only.* For David, as a king, was answerable to no human tribunal. No judge of his nation might sit to try him. *Against Thee only*, as some of the Jewish commentators will have it, because David's plots had been laid with such secrecy that no rumour of them had got abroad; at any rate, not enough for legal proof of his guilt. Or, more deeply, against *Thee only*, Who alone art without sin. Those against whom I have sinned, the woman I tempted, the man I dishonoured and slew, the people to whom I have been a scandal, these all

[1] It is well worth observing how S. Augustine, though otherwise entering deeply into the mystical, as well as literal, sense of this Psalm, says not a word on the present difficulty in this exposition; nor, so far as I am aware, does he enter on the subject in any of his works.

have sinned in their turn, and might therefore be blamed as well as I, or, in some cases, make excuses for me. But Thou art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and it is by Thy standard, not by man's, that I must be tried. And perhaps on the whole, the parable of the ten thousand talents most probably gives the true meaning: murder, as regards Urias; pollution, as regards Bathsheba; but what, either one or the other, as regards the LORD of Life, or the GOD of Purity? Then there comes a still greater difficulty: how the fact of David's having sinned against GOD alone should justify Him in His sayings. And therefore it is not wonderful that they should have attempted a different reading, which the Chaldee paraphrase gives rise to: *that Thou mightest justify me in*, or *with respect to, Thy commandments.* And again, some will have it: *so that Thou art just in Thy decree, unspotted when Thou judgest.* That is, that the sin of David, though not followed up by the avenger of blood, as, according to the Levitical law, it ought to have been, was nevertheless rightly, according to that law, punished by the GOD Who gave it. But, as those deeper interpreters teach us, here faintly and weakly, the great sacrifice for sin is set forth. David has committed a sin which must be punished by death; according to the Mosaic law, not even, were the avenger of blood pacified, might the murderer live. (Deut. xix. 13.) Then next; by the mouth of GOD'S prophet, GOD gives His pardon; "the LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not

die." (2 Sam. xii. 13.) But not absolute and unconditional pardon; the sentence of death on the child follows. We must not here work out that type; but over and over again it has been shown how the Child of Bethlehem, born to this end, that He might take on Himself the sins of the whole world, was faintly and afar off typified by this, whose death was so involved in his father's prolonged life. And, whereas David, if brought to trial, must needs have been condemned, yet that Child, His LORD and Son, when brought, as King of Israel, to trial before Pilate, was *clear* when judged, for the Roman governor was forced to say, "I find no fault in this Man." Wherefore, as He only is sinless, and faithful in all things, He must be justified whenever men sit to try His sayings. But those sayings include many promises of mercy and pardon to repentant sinners, so that when men slander Him, and declare that He will not receive the returning penitent, He is bound for His own honour to vindicate His sayings, and to make good those pledges, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," (S. Matth. xi. 28;) and, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," (S. Matth. ix. 13,) against the many that say of the weeping sinner, "There is no help for him in his GOD." (Ps. iii. 2.)

5 Behold, I was shapen in wicked-

ness : and in sin hath my mother conceived me.

On this verse the whole multitude of early and mediæval Commentators have diverged this way and that into all kinds of questions regarding the soul and body of man : when each was first created ; when the two joined together. For my own part, leaving for this time those who have thus disputed, and a host of others, I will only quote what Tauler in his commentary on the Passion says : "Let others, O LORD, dispute how sin entered into the world—how sin entered into man ; this, rather, this only would I ask Thee, that Thou Who, of a very truth, didst take our perfect nature, albeit without sin, on Thyself,—that Thou, Who knowest whereof we are made, and rememberest that we are but dust, wouldst have pity on all mine infirmities, wouldst compassionate all my weaknesses, wouldst, even in this body of sin, as Thy Church has learnt to say, not weighing my merits, but pardoning my offences, frame such a spirit as may be found worthy to enter the gates of Paradise ; such a body as may have part in the first resurrection : so that body, soul, and spirit, renewed, transfigured, reinstated ; I say not in their first, but in their more than first dignity, may together rejoice in the ineffable glory of the Beatific vision."

6 But lo, Thou requirest truth in the

inward parts : and shalt make me to understand wisdom secretly.

I cannot but see with Lorinus; the more deeply we enter into this Psalm, the more utterly we feel how unworthy we are to penetrate into the shrine of his heart, who, sinner though he were, yet, nevertheless, was the man after GOD'S own heart. But first; we must notice the difference of the Vulgate from our own translation. *But lo, Thou requirest truth : the uncertain and hidden things of Thy wisdom Thou hast made manifest to me.* We ought the more diligently to listen to S. Thomas, seeing that he will be so soon taken away from helping us. So I cannot do better than quote his own words: *Behold thou hast loved the truth.* Here—this being taken in connection with the whole history of repentance, as written in this Psalm,—you have the sum of each portion, and of the whole put together. *Thou hast loved the truth. The truth* in true sorrow as regards thyself: *the truth* in true confession as regards thy priest: *the truth* in true restitution as regards thy neighbour. *The uncertain and hidden things of Thy wisdom Thou hast made known unto me. Of Thy wisdom?* And who am I, O LORD GOD, that Thou shouldest make manifest "to me" that Wisdom Who saith, "I dwell in the highest, and My throne is in the cloudy pillar." (Ecclus. xxiv.) Thou hast made manifest to me in the triple way of prophecy: the supernatural is when the prophet speaks, "I saw the LORD sitting upon

a throne, high and lifted up:" the next, supernatural, and yet revealed to the bodily eye, as well as to the spiritual sight, of which we hear where that is written; "The LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders," (Numb. xi. 25:) and lastly, when, without any revelation supernatural either to bodily or mental sense, the manifestation was only to the deepest and inmost spirit, as where it is so often written in the Prophets, "The Word of the LORD came unto me, saying." Thus it is that the greatest doctor of all saints, the greatest saint of all doctors, teaches us on this matter; and were there any especial reason why we should value what he thus writes, it is to be found in this—that his commentary on the Psalms was the latest of all his works; was, as his immediate follower so loved to say, his swan's song; and that, while engaged in composing it,—most probably, in writing the very portion of which we have just heard the abstract,—he fell into that fainting fit which his dear sister, the Countess of Grandella, prophesied would end his work on earth.

It is not merely that GOD, loving the truth, makes the sinner know the real nature and extent of his guilt through the hidden workings of conscience, and that his confession may be full and sincere; but He will make him know Wisdom, which is the Eternal SON, Whose hidden mysteries of the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection, then as yet to come, were revealed to David in prophecy; and

are still shown to every true penitent, not as mere historical events, external to him, but as influencing his innermost nature by their secret operation on the soul.

7 Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean : Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Here, they all say, that which was merely confession by word before, becomes confession in action. Any one can submit to the former; it requires a far greater grace, though still not the crowning grace of all—that we shall come to by-and-by—to receive the latter. Look at all the ritual purifications of the Jews: the cleansing of the leper (Lev. xiv. 7), that of the leprous house (Lev. xiv. 51), the water of separation by the ashes of the red heifer (Numb. xix. 2); and then see how, even so early as the great doctor of the Western Church has taught,—even amidst a people who had been educated in the belief that temporal promises, that earthly pleasure, were the heritage of those who truly served GOD,—how even they were, in the types and parables of their offices, shown—according to that far higher Christian teaching, that it is by suffering, not by pleasure, that we may hope to draw nearest to Him That was the Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

They point, moreover, to the small size of the hyssop shrub, and its growth in stony places—such as the clefts of walls—as betokening the humility

and hard self-discipline which must accompany true repentance. Nay, adding the medicinal qualities of the plant, others tell us that not only is the Precious Blood of CHRIST the purifying stream which the hyssop sprinkles on us, but that He Himself, lowly, the Rock, and the Great Physician, is this hyssop too. We must not only be washed in His Blood, but no one can wash us therein save Himself. And note, that the ceremonial purging, effected by merely *sprinkling* the penitent (a notion brought before us here by the LXX *ῥαντιεῖς* and the Vulgate *asperges*) had its completion in the *washing*, when the clothes and person of the penitent were immersed in water. Whence they take occasion to remind us of the thorough purification which GOD offers, not merely remission, but sanctification; not merely rescue from the fellowship of the ungodly, but a throne amongst the saints; and therefore it is added, *I shall be whiter than snow*. And this for two reasons. Snow is the whitest of bodies, but the whiteness of the soul is a nobler thing than material whiteness, and even snow is surpassed in clear whiteness by light; while we read that "the righteous shall shine as the sun in the Kingdom of the FATHER."

8 Thou shalt make me hear of joy and gladness: that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.

The Vulgate, identical in meaning here, is slightly different in phrase, reading—*Thou shalt give joy and*

gladness to my hearing. Not only the declaration of pardon by the mouth of Nathan, but the inner sense of happiness which comes as the messenger of good tidings to the soul, assuring it that it is forgiven, and the voice which so speaks within the penitent is that of the HOLY SPIRIT Himself, the Spirit of joy. *Joy*, the momentary sensation, is spoken of the release from the burden and grief of sin; *gladness*, the enduring condition, of the possession of everlasting blessedness. CHRIST makes us hear of *joy* when He speaks to us as to Mary, "Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace." He makes us hear of gladness, saying, as to the thief, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." And having promised so much for the soul, He gave yet more, in that He provides for the resurrection and glorification of man's body, wherefore is added, *That the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.*

Or, as it is in the Vulgate,—and therefore this Psalm has its especial force, as one of those for the dead,—*the bones which Thou hast humbled.* But those words are taken in more senses than one: each of them so precious; each of them, in this or that way, having reference to the Incarnation. *And the bones which Thou hast humbled. Humbled*, in the fall of man; that is which Thou hast permitted —as the type of the endurance of man against temptation—so to feel their own weakness: they—in that day known to Thee—they, in the regeneration of all things, shall, as the Prophet says, "rejoice and flourish as an herb." It shows what was the depth

of meaning believed by the early and mediæval Church to lie concealed under these words, with different interpretations of them, that the references which they have been supposed to bear to our LORD's miracles and sayings in the Gospels should so entirely vary. But perhaps what S. Clement of Alexandria says is the most striking. They are to be *humbled* by faith and repentance, not to be broken by despair; they, the bones, shall hereafter rejoice—not the flesh, the seat and type of earthly passion and luxury. And he proceeds: "In the first and second Adam the case was thus far the same. In the first Adam his bones were humbled by the loss of one of them, in order that out of it the help meet for him might be made. In the second Adam so humbled, that they might all be told (Psalm xxii. 17): in the one case, by GOD's especial miracle of creation; in the other by (as with all reverence we may say it) the yet more especial and foretold miracle of His Providence." Let us hear, at the end of this verse, a noble passage of S. Jerome, in a work in which he certainly did not always write nobly:—"*The bones which Thou hast humbled shall rejoice.* I honour, in the flesh of the martyr, the scars received for the Name of CHRIST; I honour the power of Him That liveth for ever and ever in the everlasting memorial of His servant; I honour the ashes hallowed by the confession of the LORD; I honour, in those ashes, the seeds of eternity; I honour the body which hath showed me how to love my LORD,—the body which hath taught me, for my LORD, not to fear death; I

honour the body which CHRIST hath honoured on earth,—the body with which CHRIST will reign in heaven." There cannot be a better commentary on that word *rejoice*.

9 Turn Thy face from my sins: and put out all my misdeeds.

They say very well how here David rightly asks that which S. Peter, intending to ask rightly, so made request for as, had his petition been granted, it would have proved his eternal ruin. David says, *Turn Thy face*—not from me, but *from my sins*. S. Peter, mixing the two together, petitioned, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O LORD." Rather, as they teach us, the prayer of the centurion comes far nearer to this: "LORD, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof." (S. Luke v. 8.) And they remind us of that ancient type of turning away the face from sin, when Shem and Japheth, turning their backs on their father, so sympathized with his weakness, so suffered for him in his sin. And in like manner they quote—and the reader may at his leisure refer to them—those passages which tell of Ezekiel's vision, and of Rachel's artifice. (Gen. xxxi. 34.)

They tell us, too, that GOD's mercy and justice are, as it were, two faces of His, typified by the face of a man and the face of a lion in the cherubim which Ezekiel saw. When CHRIST came into the world to save the world at His first Advent, He

showed the face of a man. This face David prays in another place may be turned to him, saying,— "Hide not Thy face from Thy servant, for I am in trouble." (Psalm lxix. 18.) But when the LORD comes to judgment in His second Advent, He will show the terrible face of a lion. And this is the countenance which David prays may be averted from his sin. That sin is always before himself, and therefore he prays that GOD may look at him, not at his sin, for otherwise it must needs stand between him and the light of GOD'S countenance, eclipsing it, and preventing him from being made whole. Look then, O LORD, on Thy creature, whom Thou hast made, look upon Thine image, over which I, wretch that I am, have drawn the image of the devil. Turn Thy face from the devil's image, and be not wroth with me, but look upon Thine own image, and have pity upon me, blotting out all my misdeeds, that none may remain.

10 Make me a clean heart, O GOD: and renew a right spirit within me.

It is wonderful—or rather, perhaps, considering the malice of Satan, it is not wonderful—that the great texts which ought to be, and in themselves are, the greatest comfort for the earnest servants of our LORD, are the chief battle-fields of scholastic divinity. In this verse, as every scholar knows, the Scotists and the Thomists find, each of them, a principal argument for their respective tenets about

the mediate source of grace. Volumes would not suffice even to give an abstract of their arguments; and perhaps, as a commentator on this Psalm who lived very near to GOD says, were the matter settled, the decision on one side or on the other would neither bring to pass the conversion of one sinner, nor the edification of one saint. The difficulty, of course, lies in the word *create: Create in me a clean heart, O God:* how far, and in what sense, that spirit can be said to be created which is only turned from darkness to light; given over from the power of Satan into that of GOD; regenerated in baptism, if it so be—otherwise, after baptism, turned round in conversion from the slavery of Satan to the light yoke and easy burden of its dear LORD. That is, how the poor kine, with their affections in the Philistines' country, may nevertheless, lowing as they go, be—not forced, but—drawn, to bring up the ark of GOD to its own place (1 Sam. vi. 12): how, as another mediæval commentator tells us, the man with the measuring line in his hand may see what is the length as well as the breadth of Jerusalem. (Zech. ii. 2.) It is a fault rather of our language than of our teaching, that the identity of *spirit* and *wind*, or *breath*, is not at once perceptible. For in connection with this verse we should otherwise at once catch those: "He bloweth with His *wind*, and the waters flow" (Ps. cxlvii. 18); "What manner of man is this, that even the *wind* and the sea obey Him?" and, "Whither the spirit was to go, they"—the Living Creatures—"went, thither

was their spirit to go" (Ezek. i. 20); and, to sum up the whole, "As many as are led by the Spirit of GOD, they are the sons of GOD." Then this also has to be observed, to which I for one should never have dared to allude, did not almost all the saintly commentators on the Psalms point it out—*renew a right spirit:* "Take not Thy HOLY SPIRIT;" "Stablish me with Thy free Spirit." And so they say, taught, in the first place, (so far as I know,) by S. Bernard, that the HOLY SPIRIT is, according to His proper Name, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity; the right Spirit is spoken of the SON; the free, or princely, or royal Spirit, of the FATHER: of the FATHER, because He only is not GOD of GOD, Light of Light, very GOD of very GOD, but GOD of Himself, Light of Himself, very GOD in and of His own eternal essence: the self-existent JEHOVAH, a title which, in these days, so many, with more zeal and love than knowledge, would apply to our Blessed LORD.

And herewith agrees that remarkable gloss of Pope Urban IV. in his beautiful commentary on this Psalm, saying that GOD is Himself the very Heart of the believing soul, whereby it lives, moves, tastes, joys, sorrows, knows and understands; and consequently that the penitent here asks for much more than a mere restoration to former innocence, as most of the expositors take it, in that he prays for the personal indwelling of GOD in him by the SPIRIT taking up His abode, and making a pure temple of body and soul; therefore, asking for a new

thing, he rightly says, *create*. And note the two phrases, a *clean* heart and a *right* spirit. "There is," observes Henry Harphius, following the lead of S. Augustine, "a difference between a clean heart and a right heart. The clean heart is one out of which no evil thoughts can any longer come, which is the temple of GOD, and they who have it feel no inner sense of sin, they shun every evil, and do all holy things they can, with a good and right intention. The *right* heart has not yet reached this grade; it goes straight forward, forgetting those things that are behind, that it may attain directly to the place where the pure in heart dwell. It ascends to the hill of the LORD, but only the pure can stand there in His Presence, and abide it. The right heart is seeking the perfection which the pure heart has acquired."

11 Cast me not away from Thy presence : and take not Thy HOLY SPIRIT from me.

We may be cast away from the presence of GOD in three ways:—by losing all hope of pardon after sin, and so falling into despair; by yielding more and more to sin, and so becoming less like to CHRIST, Who is the Presence of GOD, away from which the sinner goes like Cain; by final reprobation, whereby we are banished for ever from the vision of GOD. Against all these the Psalmist makes his prayer.

From this verse the Church has taken one of the

most common and most encouraging petitions. If we ask that the HOLY SPIRIT may not be taken from us, it follows that we must have received Him. "Now, then," as one of the great preachers of the seventeenth century says, "now, then, ye who say that the HOLY GHOST is not given in Baptism, what will ye? If He is not, then are our children manifestly in a worse condition than those of the Jews. *Take not*, says David, *Thy Holy Spirit from me.* How! had David that HOLY SPIRIT? Will you answer that it was as GOD'S Prophet, as GOD'S Psalmist, as GOD'S vicegerent upon earth? And what poor miserable culprit, standing even before an earthly tribunal, would remind the judge of the especial reasons there were that he should not have fallen into the crime for which he now stood in peril of his life? And David now was capitally condemned, according to the law of the Jews, on a double charge—adultery and murder; and would he then have pleaded, Take not That HOLY SPIRIT Which has so taught me to sing Thy praises—take not That HOLY SPIRIT by Which I have been anointed king over this great people—from me? Verily, what would this have been but to stir up the hot anger of GOD even to a higher degree than it had been before kindled? No, thus it is: Because I, the son of Abraham, was, as an infant, admitted into the fellowship of Thy children, take not That HOLY SPIRIT from me, which, outwardly, at all events, then sealed me to be Thine own. Now, therefore, O disciple, not of the Catholic Church, but of Calvin,

—now, then, O follower, not of the confession of the Apostles, but of that of Augsburg,—are thy children to be better or worse off than those of the Jews? If worse, whereto serves the New Testament? If better, thank that LORD Who died for thee and for all men, that verily and truly they are regenerate; and that the multitude who died in their infancy, having received Baptism which is not that of the Church, found that That HOLY SPIRIT was not taken from them in the hour of their death, and now follow the LAMB whithersoever He goeth."

Note, moreover, that he does not say, *Give* me Thy HOLY SPIRIT, for this reason, that it is only through that SPIRIT he could have been moved to confession and repentance. "Therefore," adds that great martyr of GOD, Girolamo Savonarola, "if I invoke Thee, LORD JESU, I do so in the HOLY SPIRIT. If I sorrow for the sins I have committed, if I pray for pardon, this I assuredly do in the HOLY SPIRIT. Take Him not, then, away from me, but let Him teach me to pray, help me in my toil, and make me constant in my prayers and tears, that I may find grace with Thee, and serve Thee all the days of my life."

12 O give me the comfort of Thy help again : and stablish me with Thy free Spirit.

For *comfort of Thy help*, the A. V. has rightly, with LXX. and Vulgate, *Joy of Thy salvation*. That

is, as we may truly exclaim, "Give me CHRIST my SAVIOUR, Who is my rejoicing, my future prize, my all, my light, my praise, my home, my country, my health, my salvation. Give Him to me *again*, who have voluntarily lost Him by straying, send the Good Shepherd to reclaim the wandering sheep."

And here they say—why need I make a list of those who merely reiterate what every Priest knows, or ought to know?—how much that comfort is needed by those who either awake to a sense of their own sins, or have to bear the sins of others. No one can speak better than S. Eucherius: "Who would undertake that most terrible office of announcing the mercy of GOD to men, if they knew what was that office of standing in the place of GOD to men? There are the four Beasts round about the Throne, there are numberless beasts on earth; men like beasts; men worse than beasts; men learned in that of which beasts are altogether ignorant. I know not how this office could be undertaken, were it not that the LORD saith, 'Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.' To ask implies learning; to seek implies devotion; to knock implies self-denial. All these things must meet in the person of a Priest; the seeking, the asking, the knocking. And observe how. How, dost thou say? Both from heaven and from earth. What that seeking, asking, knocking of the sinner is, ye brethren," (for he was addressing a synod of

his Priests,) "are not ignorant. What it is as regards the great High Priest—knowledge must ask, love must seek, operation must knock; the beginning of the work is from necessity; its perseverance is in love; its action in rest; its rest in labour: this is what we owe as Priests, on the one hand, to penitents; on the other, to the great High Priest." *And stablish me with Thy free Spirit.* And *free* is such a poor translation of the word. *Liberal*, or *royal*, or better still, which the Vulgate has, *princely spirit.* They discuss, those great Doctors both of the Eastern and Western Church, what especial grace—if one may use the expression without irreverence—what favourite grace is signified by this epithet of the HOLY GHOST. It is singular to observe, by all the commentators on the Psalms, reaching down from almost Apostolic ages to this, how that especial grace, which the world then chiefly set at nought, is the Princely Spirit signified. For example: in an age of heresy, S. Ambrose will have it to be the true faith; in an age of luxury, S. Chrysostom understands it of the grace of purity; later down, in an age of feudal tyranny, it is interpreted of the freedom which, in spite of earthly bonds and fetters, the servant of GOD enjoys; the foretaste of that Jerusalem which is free; and still later, in an age of scholastic disputation, the Spirit of Wisdom is the *Princely* Spirit. In the same way that, during the many centuries of the Church's existence, *that* doctrine has been, above all others, *the* Catholic doctrine which the world, for the time

being, agreed to hate: as in the fourth century, the CONSUBSTANTIAL; in the fifth, the Incarnation; in the present, all Sacramental teaching.

13 Then shall I teach Thy ways unto the wicked: and sinners shall be converted unto Thee.

And why should he set forth this as one great end and aim of his life? And they all with one consent answer, Because, after his sin, till his repentance, he had taught to all his subjects, and to all the nations round, as he has taught to all future generations, by that one sin, Satan's ways. So the stress is to be laid on THY *ways*. Up to this time I have taught any ways but Thine; up to this time I have given great occasion to Thine enemies to blaspheme; but *then—then*, when Thou shalt have not only bestowed on me, but stablished me with Thy Princely Spirit, *then shall I teach Thy ways*. A Spirit so Princely in forgiveness as to remit my own transgressions; a Spirit so Princely in strength, as to trample under foot all future assaults of the enemy. *And sinners shall be converted unto Thee.* "How little he thought," so says the Carthusian, "what thousands and hundreds of thousands of sinners should learn repentance from this Psalm, who when," the words are worth noting, "they see Priests, highly educated, prepared with all the array of this world's learning, professing to give up themselves and their lives to the instruction and conversion of others,

find them all so utterly fail; because they speak not with the fire of the HOLY GHOST, but so coldly, so drily, so wretchedly; instead of those sharp, penetrating, red-hot words, which they who have taken in hand to bring men from darkness to light —from the slavery of Satan into the liberty of the LORD—ought to have. As saith the Apostle, 'Thou art confident that thou thyself art a guide to the blind. . . . Thou, therefore, which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?'" *Sinners shall be converted unto Thee.* They ask, Who are the three great Doctors of the Catholic Church? Surely, take them all in all, we should answer, David, the murderer; Peter, the denier; Paul, the blasphemer. And here is fulfilled what so long before the Mosaic dispensation had been written for our learning; how the Unicorn *is* now willing to serve us, *will* bring home our seed, and gather it into our barn. (Job xxxix. 9.) "See," says S. Gregory the Great, "what remission of sins this is, which not only frees the converted, but converts the bondsman. See what wisdom this is which turns the serpent's malice on himself, and out of which his very venom produces the saving efficacy of redemption as theriac out of poison."

And one who was himself a notable example of the grace of GOD in converting a sinner into a teacher, S. Augustine himself, cites this verse accordingly against the Donatists, who like the Novatians, censured the discipline of the Church as too easy in the reinstatement of the lapsed. He did

but follow in the steps of a far earlier Christian writer, who cites the immediately preceding verses of the Psalm in this sense, which may be summed up in the words of Haymo, who says that the words prove the lawfulness of restoring to office, after repentance, those who have been degraded from ecclesiastical functions by reason of sin.

14 Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, Thou that art the God of my health: and my tongue shall sing of Thy righteousness.

We must not take this text—for, except in the Vulgate, it never could be interpreted in that lovely sense—*Deliver me by means of blood-shedding:* that is, by the one Offering of Calvary. They give eight other interpretations: all of them, except this, connected with the Jewish law; whether as having to do with the punishment of death inflicted, under the Mosaic dispensation, both for murder and for adultery, or the vengeance which had been threatened, that the sword should never depart from the house of David, might be removed from his family. And it would be useless to dwell on the senses which the ingenuity of the middle ages affixed to this petition. But perhaps that which will come more nearly and dearly home to the heart of those who most frequently recite this Psalm, is this: Deliver me from the guilt of the Blood of Calvary. Where notice this: that the petition of the Jews,

as they intended it, the most awful that human lips ever uttered, "His Blood be on us and on our children," is, in another sense, that one supplication on which all our dearest hopes hang—"Not by water only, but by water and blood." And so now, *Deliver me from blood-guiltiness:* that is, not, GOD forbid! from having any interest in that most precious Blood poured forth for us on the Cross; but from having, as S. Paul says, crucified that same LORD afresh, and put Him to an open shame.

God of my health. The Prayer Book version is very weak here in comparison with the A. V., which reads correctly, *God of my salvation.* It is to Him, our SAVIOUR, we cry in our need, to save us so utterly from blood-guiltiness, from every mortal sin, that our corruption may put on incorruption. Till we 'are free from blood, we cannot attain to this, for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of Heaven." Flesh and blood did not reveal CHRIST, the SON of GOD, to Simon Bar-Jona. He will then deliver us wholly from blood when He changes our vile body into the likeness of His glorious Body, and brings us into that City of Refuge whither no avenger of blood can dare to follow us.

15 Thou shalt open my lips, O LORD: and my mouth shall show Thy praise.

Marvellous verse, which has merited to begin so

many myriads of services, since the Church first began to lead a liturgical life!

Ut queant laxis resonare fibris
Mira gestorum famuli tuorum,
Solve polluti labii reatum,
Sancte Redemptor.

That all Thy servants may with ready voices
Loudly proclaim the marvels of Thy doings,
Loose Thou the guilt which weighs on lips polluted,
Holy Redeemer.

Say, as of old, *Ephphatha:* (S. Mark vii. 34,) touch my lips with the burning coal from off the altar; give me an elect tongue, a "pure language, that" I "may call upon the Name of the LORD," (Zeph. iii. 9;) give me a learned tongue, that I may "speak as the oracles of GOD," (1 S. Pet. iv. 11;) "O let my mouth be filled with Thy praise, that I may sing of Thy glory and honour all the day long." They call to mind those noble African Confessors, who, when their tongues were cut out by the persecuting Arians, spoke none the less plainly: they point to the cloven tongues as of fire, which had no sooner sat on the Apostles, than they began to speak in divers languages the wonderful works of GOD.

Thou shalt open my lips: the Chaldee adds, *in Thy law.* They find a singular allegory in the history of the five kings hid in the cave of Machpelah. The cave is the mouth: the five kings are the sins of taste, smell, touch, sight, hearing. Our

true Joshua commands us to open our mouths in the confession of them; and when we have done so, then, and not till then, He bids us be of good courage, and put our "feet on the necks of those kings." *And my mouth shall show Thy praise.* S. Augustine: "*Thy praise*, because I have been created; *Thy praise*, because, sinning, I have not been forsaken; *Thy praise*, because I have been admonished to confess; *Thy praise*, because, in order that I might be succoured, I have been cleansed."

"Thy praise, O LORD," exclaims one of His martyrs, "is a mighty thing, for it proceedeth out of Thy fountain, whereof the sinner drinketh not, since praise is not seemly in the mouth of a sinner, for it was not sent him of the LORD. (Ecclus. xv. 9.) Thou, then, Who hast the key of David, Who shuttest, and no man openeth, Who openest, and no man shutteth, open my lips, as Thou didst open the lips of those babes and sucklings, out of whose mouth Thou didst perfect Thy praise (Ps. viii.), those Prophets and Apostles, like unto little children in pureness and simplicity, who have declared Thy Name. Make me, then, as one of Thy babes and sucklings, that I may hang at the breasts of Thy wisdom, which are better than wine, and filled therewith, show forth Thy praise."

And finally, O LORD, so *open my lips*, that I may come to Sion with songs, and everlasting joy.

16 For Thou desirest no sacrifice,

else would I give it Thee : but Thou delightest not in burnt-offerings.

17 The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, shalt Thou not despise.

Hence in many places, though not especially in his commentary on this verse, S. Augustine takes occasion to write gloriously concerning "the New Sacrifice of the New Law;" all his teaching being so marvellously bound up by S. Thomas in that almost first of Christian hymns, the sequence for Corpus Christi. One could, in spite of history, long to believe the story, (which, however, is not so undoubtedly a legend but that even at the present day it finds critical supporters), that when the new feast was instituted against the rationalizing heretics of the time, Peter Abælard, Peter the Eater, and the rest, the composition of the service was entrusted equally to the Angelic and to the Seraphic Doctor: that to the former we owe those hymns, beyond all earthly praise—*Pange lingua gloriosi Corporis ; Verbum supernum prodiens, Nec ;* and *Sacris solemniis :* while to the latter we are indebted for that noble sequence, *Lauda Syon Salvatorem.* But, in point of fact, Thomas proved himself as much the first Christian poet of his age, as —it may be with the single exception of S. Augustine—he is *the* Christian doctor of all ages.

From this verse even the Rabbis take occasion to

teach us how there is a higher Sacrifice than that of sacrificed victims. For David's sin, wilfully carried on from that first eye-glance from the house-roof, to the bloody death under the wall of Rabbath, the LORD provided no remedy: it was a hopeless offence. This is what the great mediæval writers, in their Passion Sermons, so loved to dwell on: this is why, like S. Thomas, they so constantly, with reference to the Levite that "came and looked upon the wounded man, and passed by on the other side," point us to the "certain Samaritan,"

> Cujus una stilla salvum facere
> Totum mundum quit ab omni scelere.
>
> Blood whereof one drop, for mankind outpoured,
> Might from all transgression have the world restored.

A Rabbi Jehoshua had enough insight into the true meaning of the law, to teach his disciples that a truly contrite heart was more acceptable to GOD than one million of lambs. And notice this: David, after his sin, never—so far as we are told—offered any sacrifice for it. He felt, no doubt, that he must let that alone for ever. Yet, as we have seen, it was a not unusual subject of disputation, whether his great fall, taken together with its consequences, had, on the whole, been a hindrance or a help to the Church. This we must remember: that the injury is far more visible and palpable. We partly know how, from the very beginning of the Church till the present time, the reproach has always been; "What! *this* the man after GOD's own heart! the

man who, to adultery, added murder, and that murder at second hand, involving himself in the guilt, but putting off the odium to another?" As S. Ambrose says, "O David, O David, so glorious a saint, so miserable a sinner, of a verity thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme!" More than S. Ambrose knew, more than he could have imagined: fifteen hundred years' longer scandal, and in the latest of them the pencil employed as well as the pen to scandalize those who, from the Psalms of David, have learnt to come to the Son of David. But then, on the other side, as one well worthy of his name has taught, *golden-worded* indeed in this respect: Who can tell how many penitents, all but driven to desperation, all but entering into the pains of hell, all but ready to rush out of this world into the next,—who can tell how many that have despaired of GOD'S pardon, lost all trust in His love, all but cast away the latest remnant of hope, have not taken these most divine words into their mouths, and been turned again? have not been baptized in this Jordan, and recovered from the leprosy? have not bathed in this Siloam, and received their sight? O most dear, most precious words; words, if any, worthy to be written in letters of gold; words meriting to be inscribed with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! It is not so much in the public mouth of the Church,—it is not so much in the great congregation, it is not so much when the priests, the ministers of the LORD, have stood between the

porch and the altar, that ye, as sweet-smelling frankincense, have gone up to heaven. No: it was when she of old wiped those Blessed Feet with the hairs of her head, after she had anointed them with her ointment: it was when a greater sinner than even this rejoiced to offer the body so polluted with guilt to the stake, in the presence of the heathen judges; (for Afra the harlot cried, as she went to the flames, "O JESU CHRIST, LORD GOD Almighty, Who hast not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, Whose promise is true and clear, in that Thou hast vouchsafed to say, that in what hour soever the sinner shall turn from his iniquities, in that same hour Thou wilt remember his sins no more, receive my repentance in this hour of my passion, and by this temporal fire, which is made for my body, deliver me from that eternal fire, which burns up both body and soul." And her last words were, as the flames arose, "I thank Thee, O LORD JESU CHRIST, Who hast vouchsafed to accept me as a victim for Thy Name, Who alone wast offered as a victim for the whole world upon the Cross, the Just for the unjust, the Good for the bad, the Blessed for the cursed, the Pure from sin for all sinners. I offer my sacrifice unto Thee, Who with the FATHER and the HOLY GHOST, livest and reignest GOD, for ever and ever. Amen.)—it was when merciless men, steeped up to the lips in blood, have, with all the strength and agony of their repentance, appealed to the Blood of Calvary; it was then, and in a thousand thousand like cases, that

ye, O most blessed, O most glorious words, O words that none save He, in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, could have inspired,—it was then that ye have merited to prevail!

18 O be favourable and gracious unto Sion: build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then shalt Thou be pleased with the sacrifice of righteousness, with the burnt-offerings and oblations: then shall they offer young bullocks upon Thine altar.

Up to this time David has prayed for himself: now, as every true penitent ought to do, he ends by interceding for others. And here we have one of the examples which, to a casual view, would seem to confuse the two terms: nay, and even if we take the literal sense, may seem confined to that. For consider how David had, at the time when this Psalm was written, but just fortified himself in Sion; while the walls of Jerusalem, long ago ruined in more than one siege, had not so much to be built, as to be rebuilt. But, keeping to that rule, so infallible in the enormous majority of cases, that we are bound to believe it our failure in understanding when one instance out of fifty seems not to obey the law; and then, what is the lesson? And surely this most glorious one: that, in proportion as our LORD helps forward His earthly Church, in

the same degree does He build the walls of that Jerusalem, concerning which it is written,

> "Many a blow and biting sculpture,
> Polished well those stones elect."

And why two epithets to that same dear LORD'S dealings with Sion? *Be favourable and gracious: favourable*, in every little help that He gives His servants in this world militant; *gracious*, in the entire manifestation of Himself to those in that world triumphant; *favourable*, and there may be still much of sin, more of infirmity; *gracious*, and there shall be what the schoolmen call the blessed necessity of sinlessness on the one hand, and on the other, "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick." *Be favourable:* so now That LORD is, to all who are taking up His Cross, following His banner, fighting the good fight; *gracious*, so He now is to those blessed ones who are at all events nearest—not here to debate the question whether the martyrs at once enjoy the Beatific Vision—to His Throne. *Build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.* I know not that a heathen poet has ever been to my mind quoted with more exquisite beauty than Virgil here:

> "O fortunati, quorum jam mœnia surgunt."

And what kind of walls those shall be, let Tobit tell us. "Jerusalem shall be built up with sapphires, and emeralds, and precious stones; thy walls, and towers, and battlements with pure gold;

and the streets of Jerusalem shall be paved with beryl, and carbuncles, and stones of Ophir; and all her streets shall say, Alleluia." (Tobit xiii. 16.)

Hierusalem! Hierusalem!
GOD grant I once may see
Thy endless joys; and of the same
Partaker aye to be.

Thy walls are made of precious stones,
Thy bulwarks diamonds square;
Thy gates are of right orient pearl,
Exceeding rich and rare.

Thy turrets and thy pinnacles
With carbuncles do shine;
Thy very streets are paved with gold,
Surpassing clear and fine.

Thy houses are of ivory,
Thy windows crystal clear;
Thy tiles are made of beaten gold;—
O GOD, that I were there!

Then shalt Thou be pleased with the sacrifice of righteousness. They ask, Why is it said *then?* why not *now?* And they, in the first place, who take this sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist, see the fulfilment, entire, perfect, of that Sacrifice in the sight of the Lamb as it had been slain. They who would rather take the sacrifice of righteousness to refer solely to that of Calvary, see in this prophecy, the end and aim of our dear LORD'S Passion. Therefore He tasted of death, that we should never taste of it; therefore He died, that we might live;

therefore the Cross to obtain the Crown.[1] *Then shall they offer young bullocks upon Thine altar.* And the third among the Evangelistic symbols tells us of the highest sense in which we are to take the promise:

Victus bovis Lucæ datur,
In quâ formâ figuratur
Nova Christus hostia;
Ara crucis mansuëtus
Hic mactatus, sic et vetus
Transit observantia.

Unto Luke the ox is given,
Type which figures CHRIST from heaven,
New oblation for us made;
On the Cross, His altar, lying,
Meekly there He by His dying
Makes the ancient law to fade.

Then shalt Thou be pleased, when Thou visitest Thy Church once more to amend and reform it. Not *now*, though we daily offer unto Thee gifts which please Thee not, but are hateful unto Thee. For we do not offer the sacrifices of righteousness, but only our own rites, wherefore they are not accepted. Where is now the glory of the Apostles? Where the strength of the Martyrs? Where the fruits of preachers? Where the holy simplicity of Religion? Where the virtues of the first Christians and their works? But when Thou becomest favourable and

[1] It would be too long, and would lead us too far from our subject, to see how mediæval writers, and especially the Carthusian, dwell from this verse on the virtues of the Crucified as a foundation of the heavenly Jerusalem.

gracious unto Sion, then shall all Thy servants and priests offer themselves cheerfully unto Thee, even to laying down their lives for Thy sheep, giving themselves up to the Cross, Thine Altar, by readiness to endure torments and death for Thy dear sake. *Then*, not *now*, adds the Most Christian Doctor, but when the judgment is over, and the walls of Jerusalem are built up for ever with living stones, Thou wilt receive, no longer the imperfect sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart, but the sacrifice of praise from a heart perfect in righteousness, fulfilled in glory, exulting in joy. *Then* the saints and angels will offer themselves upon the Altar, which is CHRIST, by their perfect union with Him, as *young* bullocks, because free from the yoke which the full-grown must needs bear, *young*, because they have renewed their youth as the eagles, and rejoice in their perfect freedom. *Bullocks*, too, for in the plural, as they tell us, we are to see those followers of the One True Victim who, for His sake, and keeping the two thousand cubits behind the very Ark, nevertheless, in their time, and after their degree, were sacrifices to GOD of a sweet-smelling savour: firstly and chiefly, the Martyrs; then, the Confessors; then, the Virgins; then, the Doctors; then, every righteous soul that shall have had the grace of perseverance to the end; among which GOD grant both those that shall read, and him that writes this book, to find a place for JESUS CHRIST'S sake.

And therefore:

Glory be to the FATHER, Who, according to the

multitude of His mercies, does away our offences; and to the SON, That is the GOD of our health: and to the HOLY GHOST, the Free Spirit by Whom we are established;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

COLLECTS.

We beseech Thee, O LORD our GOD, to turn Thy face from our sins, and to put out all our misdeeds; and as the publican, who stood afar off, was heard for the sake of his humility, so hear us for the merits of our Humility, that is to say of Him Who, being co-equal with Thee, His FATHER, yet for our sakes vouchsafed to take upon Him the form of a servant, our LORD JESUS CHRIST. Through.

O GOD, Who, the more we hide our sins, the more bringest them into open day; Who out of doubt dost bring certainty, out of error, truth; visit us with the dew of Thy mercy: so putting out all our misdeeds, as to make us a new heart by the infusion of Thy HOLY GHOST, to the end that we, rejoicing in such an indweller, may have our mouth opened for the declaration of Thy praise. Amen. Through.

O LORD JESU CHRIST, GOD of our salvation, Who by Thy salutary Passion dost extinguish all our evil Passions; give to us Thy servants forgiveness of our sins and remission of our guilt, to the

end that from Thee, O LORD, we may one day receive eternal life. Amen. Through.

Almighty GOD, grant, we beseech Thee, that the secrets of our heart, daily defiled by cares of the flesh, may be sprinkled and cleansed with the hyssop of Thy Word, that the crafty sower may depart from us, and CHRIST the LORD abide in us as our consolation. Through Thy mercy.

Unto Thee, O LORD, we cry. Have mercy upon us: heal our souls, because we have sinned against Thee; for it is Thine to have mercy on us and to grant us pardon, it is Thine to bestow healing on the wounds of our soul, and not to exact the vengeance due for our open sins, nor to repay us the punishment we deserve.

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